

## IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

Historicism and Kant: the context of Prussia under Frederick the Great's 'benevolent absolutism'

Kant v. Machiavelli: "right ought never to be adapted to politics, but politics ought always be adapted to right"

Kant and the **Enlightenment**: "*sapere aude!*" ('dare to know')

- The belief that all social, cultural, and religious institutions should be subjected to rational scrutiny
- The teleological belief in the concept of intellectual progress

Kant's **deontological** moral philosophy: the **categorical imperative**: moral **maxims**, for Kant, must have the following features

1. Formula of Universal Law: actions must be universalizable
2. Formula of the End in itself, or the 'principle of personality': treat every moral agent as an end in itself, and not as a means toward another end (effectively, the Golden Rule)

The influence of Kantian philosophy on subsequent political thought (his influence on other domains of philosophy is vast, and cannot be properly addressed here)

- John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* and Jürgen Habermas' "public sphere" both defend Kantian universalism in the modern age of relativism
- "Perpetual Peace" foreshadowed the modern **democratic peace theory**

**"Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?"**

Answer = "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity." (How does Kant define immaturity? Its being 'self-incurred'?)

- Do you agree that "laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large proportion of man...gladly remain immature for life"? (There are two parts to this, to which you can agree or disagree either in part or in whole...)
- "Dogmas and formulas, those mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse), of [man's] natural endowments are the ball and chains of his permanent immaturity." Examples?
- What is Kant's criticism of revolution (as against gradualism) in this piece?
- In a modern context, do you agree that "all that is needed...for Enlightenment of this kind...is freedom"? What else might be causing 'immaturity' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Perpetual Peace**: "*fiat justitia, pereat mundus*" ('let justice be done, though the world perish')

First Section

- Do you think this document is overly idealistic (especially in light of what we've read to date)?
- How does Kant distinguish peace from "mere truce"?
- Which of his propositions seem commonsensical today? Which seem 'absurd'?
- The doctrine of non-intervention (First Section -5)
- *Jus ad bellum* vs. *Jus in bello* – Kant on the rationale for just war theory (First Section – 6)

Second Section: on "Pacific Federations"

- To what extent does Kant's idea of 'pacific federations' reflect the European Union? ("Each nation, for the sake of its own security, can and ought to demand of the others that they should enter along with it into a constitution, similar to the civil one, within which the rights of each could be secured. This would mean establishing a *federation of peoples*."
- Acknowledging that a world republic is unattainable, why does Kant believe that an ever-growing federation of democratic states will avoid war?

**Contrasting Kantian Deontology to Utilitarianism (the topic of next week's readings)**: Kant does not consider it the purpose of politics to make people happy. Happiness is subjective, he says, and so he condemns utilitarianism, whether in politics or in ethics. Do you agree?